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SUBJECT: POLLING CENTER CLOSURES AND RELOCATIONS

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: DSRSG Peter Galbraith's July 18 extraordinary meeting that included Minister Of Defense Wardak, Deputy Minister Of Interior Sadiqi, IEC Chief Electoral Officer Dr. Najafi, IEC Chief Operations officer Hashem, ISAF Chief of Stability and Operations Admiral Borsboom, the UK Charge, the Canadian Ambassador, the EU Ambassador and Ambassador Carney was called to resolve the critical issue of determining which of the Independent Election Commission's (IEC) 6966 polling centers will open on August 20. The Ministry of Defense (MOD) and the Ministry of Interior (MOI) play a crucial role in determining an answer to this question - which has the potential to impact public perception of Pashtu enfranchisement and the success of the election. MOI and MOD have the responsibility of surveying the viability of all polling center locations, but they have not completed the surveys of all these sites. The IEC is still waiting for a final list of which polling centers will open and which will be relocated. The IEC is particularly concerned about 1200 polling centers in troubled areas. Galbraith's unrealized goal for the meeting was to resolve which of these 1200 polling centers in question should be relocated or cease to exist, and to carefully manage that decision. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Galbraith opened with a stern warning that of the 6966 IEC designated polling centers, 1200 are located in Taliban-occupied districts or insecure districts where ANSF cannot provide security, reducing the possibility of the centers opening on polling day. He explained that having over 1000 "ghost polling centers" that exist only on paper would seriously undermine the election process, the international community, and the UN's role in the election. It is critical to resolve which of the 1200 polling centers will truly not open and those that should be relocated. Unless the IEC carefully manages expectations and operates with full transparency, the public could perceive that the election failed due to the unopened polling centers. The ghost centers could also lead to public confusion and greater opportunities for fraud. The IEC's highly synchronized logistics plan is scheduled to begin shipment of election materials from Kabul on July 21. Thus an accurately surveyed final polling center list must be produced soonest.

¶3. (SBU) Wardak replied that MOD and MOI are already addressing the problem and on July 16 had begun surveying all polling centers. He asserted that 1550 polling centers have been surveyed and the MOD and MOI will finish their assessment of the remaining 4959 within a few days. He added "in a few days we will have a clear picture and should be able to tell you which polling sites will open and how many will have to be relocated." He also noted that Minister of Interior Atmar plans to use local community security through the tribal system to help secure questionable polling sites, as was done in the last elections. Wardak recognized the negative impact the lack of an accurate polling center list has on logistical arrangements, but did not see it as a doomsday situation and asked the group to allow ANSF time to complete the surveys. COMMENT: The IEC gave MOD and MOI a complete list of polling sites that required surveying on April 15. END COMMENT.

¶4. (SBU) The IEC reiterated that their logistics plan begins July 21. To maintain the integrity of the process, all election materials must be carefully packed and labeled with precise destinations before they are shipped from the IEC's Kabul headquarters. The IEC stressed that they have no flexibility and

are already behind schedule making further delays problematic. The IEC noted that to the most insecure areas take the longest to transport and the IEC needs to send those shipments first - not last after those to more secure areas have already gone out. The IEC need ANSF to complete the security surveys and/or decisions on tribal security solutions within the next few days. COMMENT: With such a track record of ANSF delay IEC is not giving an inch of flexibility, but, in fact can cope with some extra days delay. END COMMENT.

15. (SBU) DRSG Galbraith reiterated that time is too short to have a vague solution. He stressed that the IEC needs an exact list of polling sites that will open on July 21 and answers as to what will happen to the rest. Ambassador Carney pointed out the urgent need to publically manage this information. COMMENT: the IEC, aware that they need to be out in front of managing this crisis, have already begun to use Tolo TV to release information to the public that a portion of the polling centers in troubled areas will not open. END COMMENT. Galbraith noted that the 1200, or 15% to 20% of the total, polling centers are located in sparsely populated areas and would not proportionally impact the population's ability to vote. If managed correctly Afghans and internationals will be aware and would understand that the reality is the result of a worsened security situation. Wardak agreed to do everything possible to finalize the surveys but would not commit to a date. He thanked the international community for its support of the election. Galbraith said that the meeting had been a "full and frank" exchange of ideas on a difficult and crucial subject. He asked for the group to reconvene on July 23 to determine ANSF's progress on completing a final list of polling centers.

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